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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000150

SIPDIS SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE  
SBU DELIBERATIVE PROCESS  
DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E AND AF/RSA  
AFRICOM AND CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD  
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA-WATCHER

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SUBJECT: FRENCH FM KOUCHNER'S VISIT FOCUSES ON DJIBOUTI-ERITREA,  
SOMALIA, AND SOMALI PIRACY

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CLASSIFIED BY: Eric Wong, Charge d'affaires, a.i., U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy, Djibouti; REASON: 1.4(A), (B), (D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. FM Kouchner's surprise February 21-22 visit to Djibouti focused on Djibouti-Eritrea, Somalia, and countering Somali piracy, but did not address bilateral issues, according to the French Ambassador. Despite the expiration of the 5-week deadline imposed by UNSCR 1862 for Eritrea to withdraw from Ras Doumeira, France (and Russia) is awaiting the official release of the UNSYG's report before taking any further action. The French Ambassador cited "other mediation efforts" and a possible role by Iran. On Somalia, France is "studying" whether French forces in Djibouti may be able to train instructors for Somali security forces, albeit on a limited scale. Noting that EU counter-piracy forces from various countries are currently operating from a French naval base in Djibouti, the French Ambassador offered the French naval base as a possible site for an expanded counter-piracy coordination center; however, non-EU counter-piracy forces (e.g., anticipated from Japan and Korea) are likely to face some French restrictions on using French facilities. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On February 25, French Ambassador Dominique Decherf briefed the diplomatic corps on the February 21-22 visit to Djibouti of French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner. Decherf said Kouchner's stop in Djibouti (after visiting neighboring Yemen) was "certainly a surprise", but that such ministerial-level visits had been envisioned following the December 2007 state visit by Djiboutian President Guelleh to Paris. Most recently, the French defense minister had visited Djibouti in 2008. (NOTE: One French Embassy contact asserted that the French DCM had received only 24 hours notice of Kouchner's visit to Djibouti. END NOTE.)

13. (SBU) According to Decherf, Kouchner's visit focused on the situation between Djibouti and Eritrea, Somalia, and international counter-piracy efforts; the visit reportedly did not address bilateral Franco-Djiboutian relations, which Decherf characterized as normal.

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RUSSIA AND FRANCE: AWAITING UNSYG REPORT ON DJ-ER  
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14. (U) Decherf observed that the unanimous adoption of UNSCR 1862 in January 2009--calling, inter alia, for Eritrea to withdraw its troops, as Djibouti had already done, from the Ras Doumeira area bordering Djibouti--had occurred under the French presidency of the UN Security Council. The 5-week period called for by UNSCR 1862 had expired on February 19, and the UN Secretary-General (UNSYG) was to report to the UNSC within one week on the status of implementation and on next steps.

15. (SBU) Decherf reported that France and Djibouti had "exchanged views" on possible UNSC action after the expiration of this deadline. He noted that UNSCR 1862 had been jointly drafted by Djibouti and France, and had been introduced by France. In the past, he added, Qatar and Libya had sought to mediate between Djibouti and Eritrea (Qaddafi had traveled to Asmara, to no avail); perhaps mediation by Iran, as a good friend of both countries, could be discussed during the ongoing (February 24-25) visit to Djibouti by Iranian President Ahmadinejad. French officials had told Djiboutian counterparts "not to despair," Decherf said.

16. (SBU) During follow-up questions, Ethiopia's Ambassador to Djibouti observed that Eritrea had clearly rejected UNSCR 1862. Decherf responded that during FM Kouchner's visit, "there was no conclusion" on next steps; "of course, we have to await the UNSYG's report." For France, there was "a range of possibilities," from sanctions to "other mediation efforts." "At this point, we have not decided anything," Decherf declared. Russia's Ambassador to Djibouti Alexander Bregadze added that Russia also took the position that it must await the UNSYG's report.

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FOCUS ON SOMALI SECURITY FORCES, NOT AMISOM  
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17. (SBU) On Somalia, Decherf reported that France supported the new government of Somalia. FM Kouchner had met with both President Sheikh Sharif (who departed Djibouti for Somalia on February 23) and with Somalia's new prime minister; Somalia's foreign minister

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was attending the international contact group meeting in Brussels. The main issue discussed, Decherf said, was how to enhance security in Mogadishu, in accordance with the Djibouti Process agreement, through the reinforcement of Somali national security forces. Kouchner did not discuss AMISOM with Djiboutian officials, Decherf said.

18. (SBU) According to Decherf, the GODJ had agreed to host training of Somali security forces in Djibouti. Some 10-100 Somalis could be trained at existing Djiboutian military schools at Arta or Hol-Hol. French officials were now studying whether the French military could assist with "train-the-trainer" instruction in Djibouti, just as French forces had previously conducted training in Uganda and Burundi for contingents deploying to support AMISOM. (NOTE: As of February 28, the Djiboutian military liaison officer serving with CJTF-HOA was unaware of plans to train Somali security forces in Djibouti, but said the concept above was "feasible." END NOTE.)

19. (SBU) Decherf reported that Djiboutian FM Mohamoud Ali Youssouf had asserted that the Arab League may finance such training, as well as pay salaries for such security forces. Palestinian Ambassador Kamil Abdallah Gazzaz (the dean of Djibouti's diplomatic corps) neither confirmed nor denied this assertion, but only noted that Somali President Sharif would attend the March 20 Arab League ministerial in Doha, Qatar.

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FRENCH OFFER TO COORDINATE COUNTER-PIRACY FROM DJIBOUTI  
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110. (SBU) FM Kouchner's discussions with Djiboutian officials on Somali piracy were timely, Decherf said, citing February 24-25 contact group consultations in London. The Government of Djibouti was "preoccupied" with the influx of foreign maritime forces seeking to come to Djibouti to support counter-piracy operations, Decherf said. Such forces included ships and planes from the EU's Operation Atalanta, the United States, China, Russia, India, Turkey, and possibly Japan (septel) and Korea. Of particular concern, Decherf said, were varying rules of engagement--"Indians fire without reservation"--as well as different policies on detention of suspected pirates (ranging from holding for trial, to disarming and release).

111. (U) Noting that the January 2009 IMO counter-piracy conference in Djibouti had concluded that IMO centers for maritime training and information-sharing be established in Djibouti and Yemen respectively, Decherf highlighted that the International Contact Group on Piracy Off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) had proposed establishing a separate operational center to coordinate military (i.e., naval) operations against piracy. Having such coordination occur was "more important than where this coordination takes place," Decherf said.

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FRENCH: USE OUR BASE, BUT NOT OUR HOSPITAL  
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112. (U) Decherf noted, however, that coordination among French, Spanish, Greek, and UK naval forces was already occurring at the French naval base in Djibouti--under the aegis of the EU's Operation Atalanta, which would be led by a Greek admiral until April, followed next by Spain and the Netherlands. Coordination at the French naval base in Djibouti could readily be expanded to include coordination of other (non-EU) counter-piracy forces; indeed, the French base could be the location of the CGPCS's envisioned coordination center, Decherf said.

113. ((U) Observing that on behalf of the EU, he had signed a status of forces agreement (SOFA) for EU forces in Djibouti in December 2008, Decherf said France had agreed to lend its facilities to such EU forces (i.e., Operation Atalanta). As for other foreign forces seeking to use French military facilities in Djibouti, particularly the French military hospital (Bouffard), Decherf said EU forces would be allowed to use Bouffard "as a right," whereas use by troops from other countries would be reviewed "on a case-by-case basis."

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RUSSIA: FREEDOM OF NAVIGATION IS PARAMOUNT  
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114. (SBU) Russian Ambassador Bregardze hailed international cooperation on counter-piracy, noting that increased military presence, not adverse weather, had likely led to the recent decrease in pirate attacks. Uncertainty, stemming from lack of uniform rules of engagement, may have a deterrent effect, he said. As pirates were known to have informants at ports worldwide, international coordination on counter-piracy needed to be discrete and varied, so pirates would not know exactly what was being coordinated. International resolve against piracy was necessary to maintain freedom of navigation, Bregadze added, especially through the strategic Bab-al-Mandeb strait adjacent to Djibouti.

115. (C) COMMENT. Kouchner's impromptu visit highlights the key geo-strategic role Djibouti is playing in the Horn of Africa, from hosting Somali reconciliation talks and ever increasing international counter-piracy forces, to holding the line against Eritrean encroachment. Amb. Decherf's remarks suggest that French officials are more seized with seeking to take the lead on coordinating other nation's efforts to counter Somali piracy, than with the more Sisyphean task of reversing Eritrean aggression. The growing number of EU counter-piracy forces working out of French military facilities in Djibouti may be rivalled in the future by non-EU forces (e.g., from Japan and Korea) seeking to work from U.S. facilities, but limited space and SOFA issues for such non-EU forces are obstacles that need to be addressed at the Washington level. END COMMENT.

WONG

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